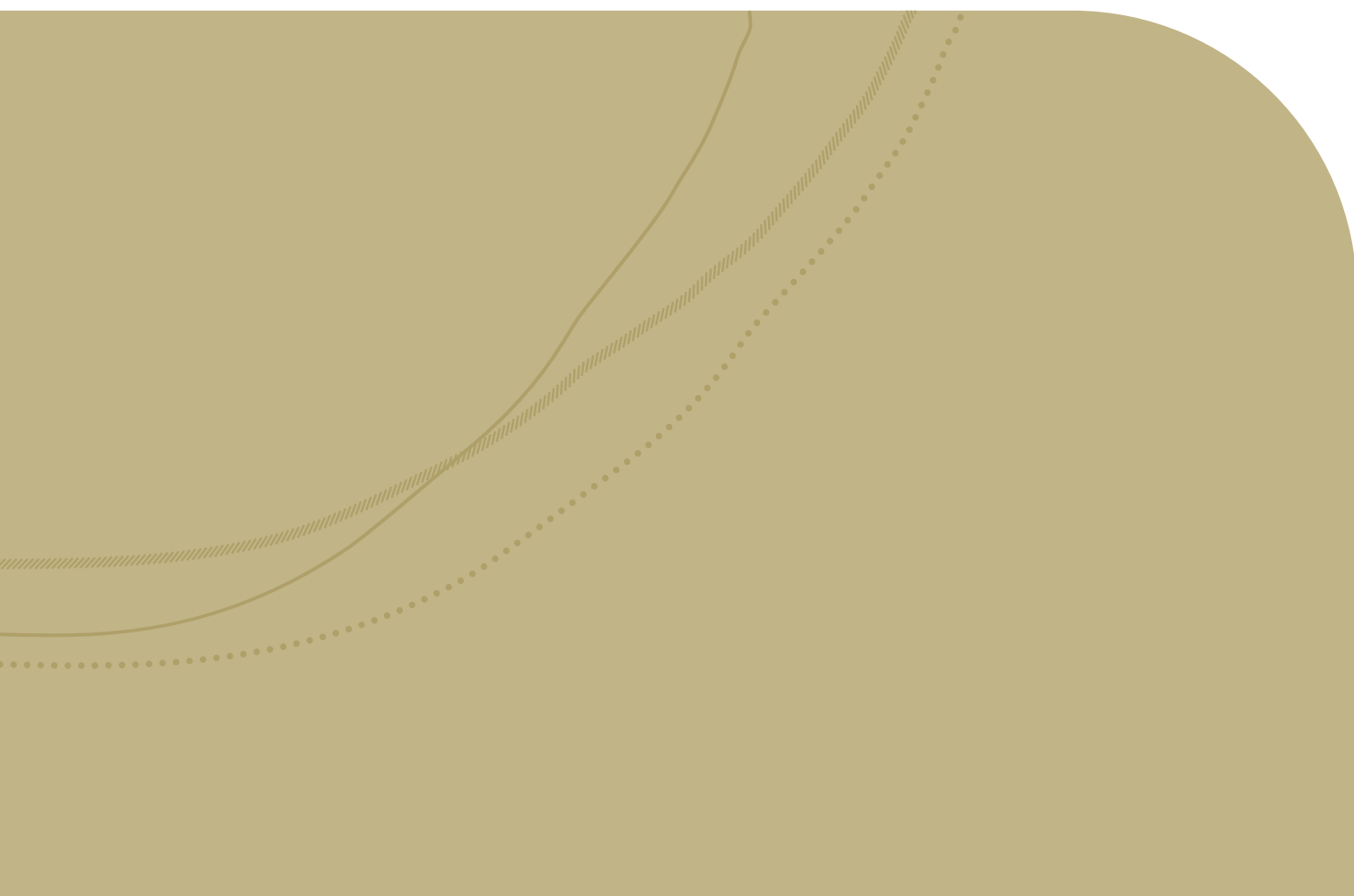


Victorian Landcare Program Strategic Plan

Supporting Landcare for the Future



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Published by the Victorian Government
Department of Sustainability and Environment Melbourne
August 2012.

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Authorised by the Victorian Government, 8 Nicholson Street, East Melbourne.
Print managed by Finsbury Green. Printed on recycled paper.

ISBN 978-1-74287-570-5 (print)
ISBN 978-1-74287-571-2 (online)

For more information contact the DSE Customer Service Centre 136 186

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Minister's foreword

Since Landcare began in Victoria 25 years ago, it has grown into a thriving community with more than 60,000 members across the state. Landcarers give freely of their time to care for Victoria's land, water and biodiversity, and their enthusiasm, dedication and hard work is inspiring.

The Victorian Government recognises the value of Landcare in achieving successful outcomes for our environment, local communities and economy. We are committed to supporting Landcare groups and networks to continue their important work.

The Victorian Landcare Program Strategic Plan will guide the Victorian Government's key program of support to strengthen Landcare.

This strategic plan was developed with the input of the Landcare community, including the Victorian Landcare Council, the Farm Tree and Landcare Association and the Echuca Landcare Group.

Feedback on the Victorian Government's future focus for Landcare came in from all across the state and I would like to thank everyone for the valuable contribution.

The Victorian Landcare Program, managed by the Department of Sustainability and Environment, will provide targeted support to help Landcare groups and networks achieve five key functions – operate effectively, engage the community, collaborate, do on ground works and tell the Landcare story.

The Victorian Government, in partnership with the Landcare community, will continue working to achieve the goal of the Victorian Landcare Program, which is to have a shared responsibility for a healthy environment.

This strategic plan will be reviewed in five years to make sure the focus remains current, responsive and successful in effectively supporting the Landcare community.

Building on Landcare's successful history, together we can continue to achieve great on-ground outcomes for our land – now and into the future.

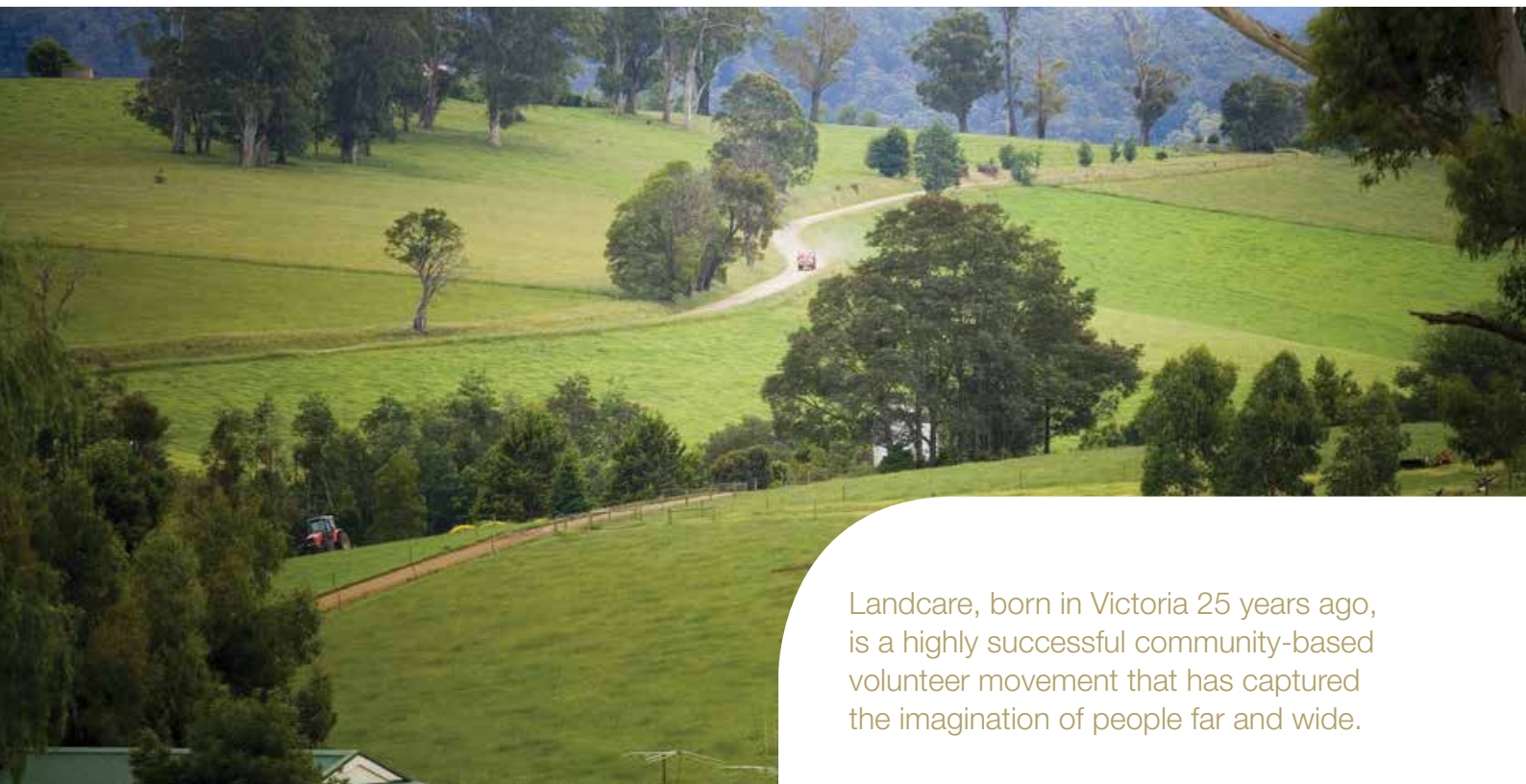


A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Ryan Smith

Minister for Environment and
Climate Change

Introduction



Landcare, born in Victoria 25 years ago, is a highly successful community-based volunteer movement that has captured the imagination of people far and wide.

Supporting Volunteers and Landholders

Victoria has a diversity of landscapes and land uses, and an enthusiastic volunteer community. The Victorian Government (Government) wants to help volunteers and landholders undertake actions that improve the condition of our environment and the sustainability of farming, drawing on their local knowledge and expertise.

One of the ways the Government assists environmental volunteers and landholders is by providing support to Landcare – a highly successful and innovative community-based volunteer movement that facilitates and coordinates actions to care for our land. The Victorian Landcare Program (VLP) is the Government's program of support for Landcare.

The VLP is a catalyst. By supporting Landcare in a strategic way – that includes the delivery of services and initiatives – it helps Landcare groups and networks to be more powerful as they work to stop the decline and improve the health of our natural resource base.

The goal of the VLP is: 'Shared Responsibility for a Healthy Environment'.

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this Strategic Plan is to ensure that the VLP is more effective in supporting Landcare. To achieve this task, the Strategic Plan outlines the five functions of Landcare that the VLP will target with its support:

- Operate
- Engage
- Collaborate
- Do
- Tell

The scope of the Strategic Plan is limited to the VLP and its support of Landcare in Victoria. It is not a Strategic Plan for Landcare. The Strategic Plan is about providing high-level guidance to make the VLP more effective in supporting Landcare into the future. The Strategic Plan has been designed to allow flexibility in the operational delivery of the VLP. This flexibility will ensure that the VLP responds to changing circumstances and also to the needs of the Landcare community in Victoria.

Landcare and Change

Landcare in Victoria

Landcare began when farming neighbours recognised that they could be more effective and have a greater impact if they addressed common natural resource management concerns together. The first Landcare group was formed at Winjallok near St. Arnaud in Victoria in 1986.¹

Over the decades since its inception, Landcare has become part of the social fabric of Victoria. It has achieved success in nurturing a more sustainable land management ethos and practice.

Landcare is many things to many people but it is still about a simple idea; people organising to come together to discuss shared issues, and to design and implement practical solutions. People see results and want to be part of it.

From its perennial roots in production agriculture, Landcare has branched out to encompass environmental citizenship as practiced via different land uses and management practices on both public and private land – in the bush, along the coast, and in urban and peri-urban areas.

There are now more than 750 Landcare community groups and networks, and more than 500 other community-based natural resource management groups in Victoria. In total, these community-based natural resource management groups include around 60,000 members and an additional 45,000 volunteers that contribute their time and energy each year to undertake local action to care for the land. Importantly, in most catchment management regions about a third of all community-based natural resource management group members are farmers.²

Over time, Landcare has become more connected. While Landcare groups are embedded and continue to operate at the local community scale, over half of these groups are now linked to and represented by Landcare networks that tie activities together at a broader or more strategic landscape scale. Other community-based natural resource management groups are part of Landcare networks too. Landcare networks represent a substantial new tier of community-based natural resource management organisation. Presently, there are more than 60 Landcare networks in Victoria.



Landcare is launched in Winjallok near St. Arnaud in Victoria in 1986 (Photo courtesy of the Victorian Farmers Federation Photo Library)

For 25 years community volunteers have been leading Landcare in Victoria.

Landcare is community-based leadership in action. Landcare groups and networks develop their own priorities, organise community activities, and source support and funding from entities including federal, state and local governments, catchment management authorities, private businesses, non-profit organisations, and individuals. Key activities include engaging people, building partnerships, doing on-ground works, sharing stories and skills, and celebrating success.

Research affirms that the on-ground works undertaken through Landcare lead to improvements in the condition of our natural resources.³ What's more, these works are accomplished in a very cost effective way in terms of the on-ground actions achieved relative to the amount of public funds invested. This cost effectiveness is attributable to low coordination and administration costs, the provision of volunteer labour, and significant landholder contributions (both cash and in-kind) to projects.

The public value of Landcare is significant. In addition to the environmental gains, major social and economic benefits are produced for participants and the communities in which they live.

In strengthening people's understanding of Landcare, it is essential that Landcare is not so tightly defined as to prevent a wide range of approaches to natural resource management – tailored for specific community circumstances or interests – from coming under the Landcare banner.

The Australian Framework for Landcare, developed by a reference group made up of Landcare community members, states the national vision for Landcare:

All Australians will take responsibility for the way they live in the landscape to ensure a healthy environment that supports a sustainable future.⁴

With a strong history of success behind them, Landcarers are now looking ahead at how they can continue to be effective and innovative in the context of trends related to the environment, agriculture, volunteering and natural resource management.

1 Campbell, A. (1994). Landcare: Communities shaping the land and the future. Allen & Unwin. St. Leonards, NSW, Australia.

2 Curtis, A. & Sample, R. (2010). CBNRM in Victoria: Contributing to dialogue, learning and action. Institute for Land, Water and Society, Charles Sturt University. Albury, NSW, Australia.

3 Curtis, A. et al. (2008). Achieving NRM outcomes through voluntary action: Lessons from Landcare. Department of Sustainability and Environment. East Melbourne, VIC. Australia.

4 Australian Framework for Landcare Reference Group (2010). Australian Framework for Landcare.

Opportunities and challenges

The context in which Landcare operates is always changing – with new and emerging environmental issues, and social and economic shifts. Landcare, in its own way, needs to consider this changing context so that it can respond and remain relevant and successful. The VLP needs to consider this changing context so that it can be agile and adjust the support it provides to Landcare.

The trends below outline some of the major opportunities and challenges in Landcare's operating space at this time.

Divergent Demographics: Demographic change is reconfiguring land use patterns, land management motivations, land values, and social structures.

For example, there are high rates of absentee ownership of rural properties, many areas are more socially diverse than ever, the population is aging, and engaging young people in land management is a significant challenge.

Volunteers On The Move: More than ever before, people are changing jobs and careers, moving house/property, commuting further to work, and travelling around the state and world for both work and pleasure.

Biodiversity Decline: Species threatened with extinction, the spread of invasive pests and weeds, and the poor condition of many rivers and streams; these are some of the symptoms of ecosystems struggling to find the support they need to be healthy in altered landscapes.

Simultaneously, Victorians are recognising the environmental, economic and social values of the land. Biodiversity has always been integral to the culture of Victorian Aboriginal people and communities.

Looking forwards, significant work is required to improve the condition of our landscapes. The resources needed to undertake this work will need to come from a concerted collaborative effort involving individual landholders, organisations and Government.

Climate Change: Victoria's climate is highly variable. Events such as droughts, floods and fires are expected.

Preparing for and managing the impacts of a changing climate will become increasingly important. In the future, our climate may include more warm and dry weather and more heavy downfalls of rain when it does occur, especially during summer and autumn.

Responding to climate change in a tangible way – on the ground – should orientate the thinking and work of Landcare and the VLP for the years ahead.

Efficient Use: Economic growth and population growth is increasing the demand for many natural resources. At the same time, many natural resource reserves are depleting.

Coming decades will see a continued focus on productivity improvements through the efficient use, combined with better stewardship of natural resources for future generations. Tools will include research, development and extension (RDE); training and education; voluntary and market mechanisms; and regulation.

Efficiency will affect the use of land, labour and financial capital. Water use efficiency, farm planning, farm enterprise consolidation, the asset-based approach to natural resource management investment, carbon markets... the list of tangible effects from this trend is long.

Getting Help: Increasingly, people want access to support that addresses their specific needs. At the same time, due to the vast array of support providers and specialisation, it is becoming harder for people to determine who they should contact for assistance. In the future, people are likely to need a way to signal their need for assistance, and information on how they can connect to support.

As a result, more people will be seeking one off (episodic) volunteering opportunities (from a few hours to a few weeks) that they can fit into their busy lives, rather than committing to ongoing roles that they may find difficult to fulfil.

Information Technology: The world of information technology is advancing. Computing power and memory storage is improving rapidly. Many more devices are getting connected to the internet. Geographical information systems are becoming commonplace, mobile phone use is widespread, and internet speeds are increasing.



The Program

Government's Intent

The Government, in partnership with communities, has a role in maintaining a healthy natural resource base for current and future generations. A key priority for Government is to promote local action on the environment – to empower people with information to make well-informed choices and to bring about outcomes on the ground. The Government is also responsible for using public resources in an efficient and effective way, for the benefit of society as a whole.

DSE's Role

DSE is the Government's lead agency for the development and implementation of environment and water policy. Guided by these policies, it invests in projects and programs that have tangible and demonstrable environmental and community benefits for Victoria.

When shaping policy, DSE ensures that contemporary standards of policy and regulation are maintained so that outcomes and logic are clear. The same standards of transparency underpin DSE's investment programs and delivery of environmental regulation.

Recently, DSE has strengthened its regional structure so it can work more closely with communities and businesses to make policy and regulation – and the administrative processes that underpin them – easier to understand. DSE will continue to work to support local communities and landholders engaged in environmental works; and implement clear, consistent environmental approval and regulation processes.

DSE also aims to cut red tape to ensure that a higher proportion of its investment ends up in on-ground works rather than administration.

The Government recognises that supporting Landcare is a valuable investment in Victoria's future, and it is committed to continuing this support.

The Victorian Landcare Program

The Victorian Landcare Program (VLP) is the title of the program of support provided to Landcare by Government and managed by DSE. The VLP includes the delivery of services and initiatives to support Landcare.

VLP activities have historically included:

- State-wide and regional coordination – investing in regional and state-wide coordination services, and focused engagement with Victorian Aboriginal people and communities, and corporate stakeholders
- Investment – administering the Victorian Landcare Grants and other one-off grants e.g. the 25th Anniversary of Landcare Grants
- Communications – coordinating the production of the Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management Magazine, Landcare Notes, supporting the Victorian Landcare Gateway website and the provision of other relevant information
- Connections – coordinating Landcare conferences and awards, facilitating stakeholder meetings and other networking opportunities and activities
- Initiatives – implementing fixed-term Government initiatives such as the Victorian Local Landcare Facilitators Initiative;
- Training – providing information and training to Landcare groups and networks on topics such as group governance, information management, and other important requirements including monitoring, evaluation and reporting
- Research – commissioning research and interpreting the results of a wide range of data relevant to Landcare
- Monitoring and reporting – coordination of the Victorian Landcare Report Card and regional monitoring.

To ensure public value is being delivered, the mix of these activities will be adjusted over time to align with the new direction as outlined in this Strategic Plan. New services and initiatives will be added, and others may conclude.

In addition to the VLP, the Government provides support to Landcare and incentives to individual landholders through other programs and initiatives that focus on natural resource management and sustainable agriculture.

The Partnership Approach

Getting Results Together

Government recognises that Landcare belongs to the community, and respects Landcare's independence and autonomy, and its partnership. The Government wants to support, not direct Landcare. The purpose of this Strategic Plan is to articulate and communicate the five functions that Government, through the VLP, wants to support Landcare to undertake. These five functions are based on an underpinning 'Program Logic' for the VLP and take account of the challenges and opportunities facing Landcare.

The Government wants to support Landcare to:

Operate
effectively and efficiently

Engage
communities in
environmental stewardship

Collaborate
with others to enhance
skills and possibilities

Do
on-ground works that
make a difference

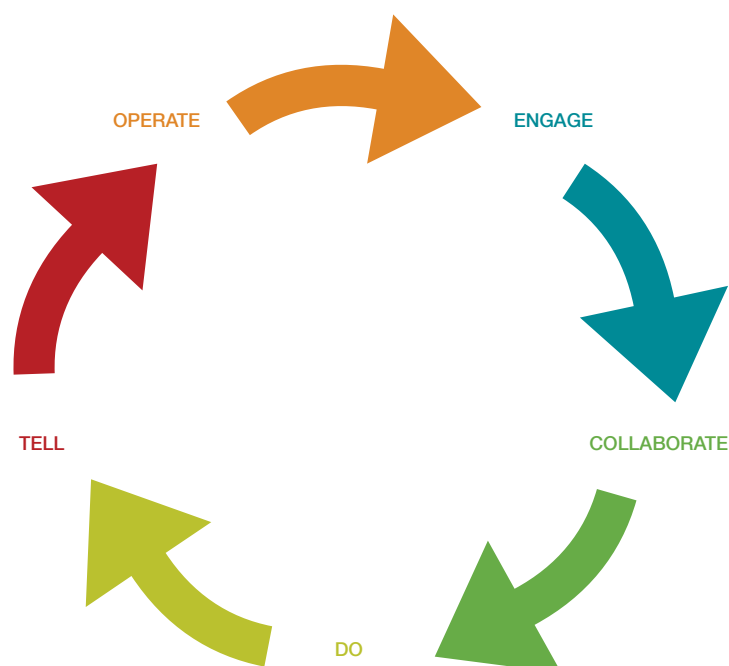
Tell
people about the
successes and lessons



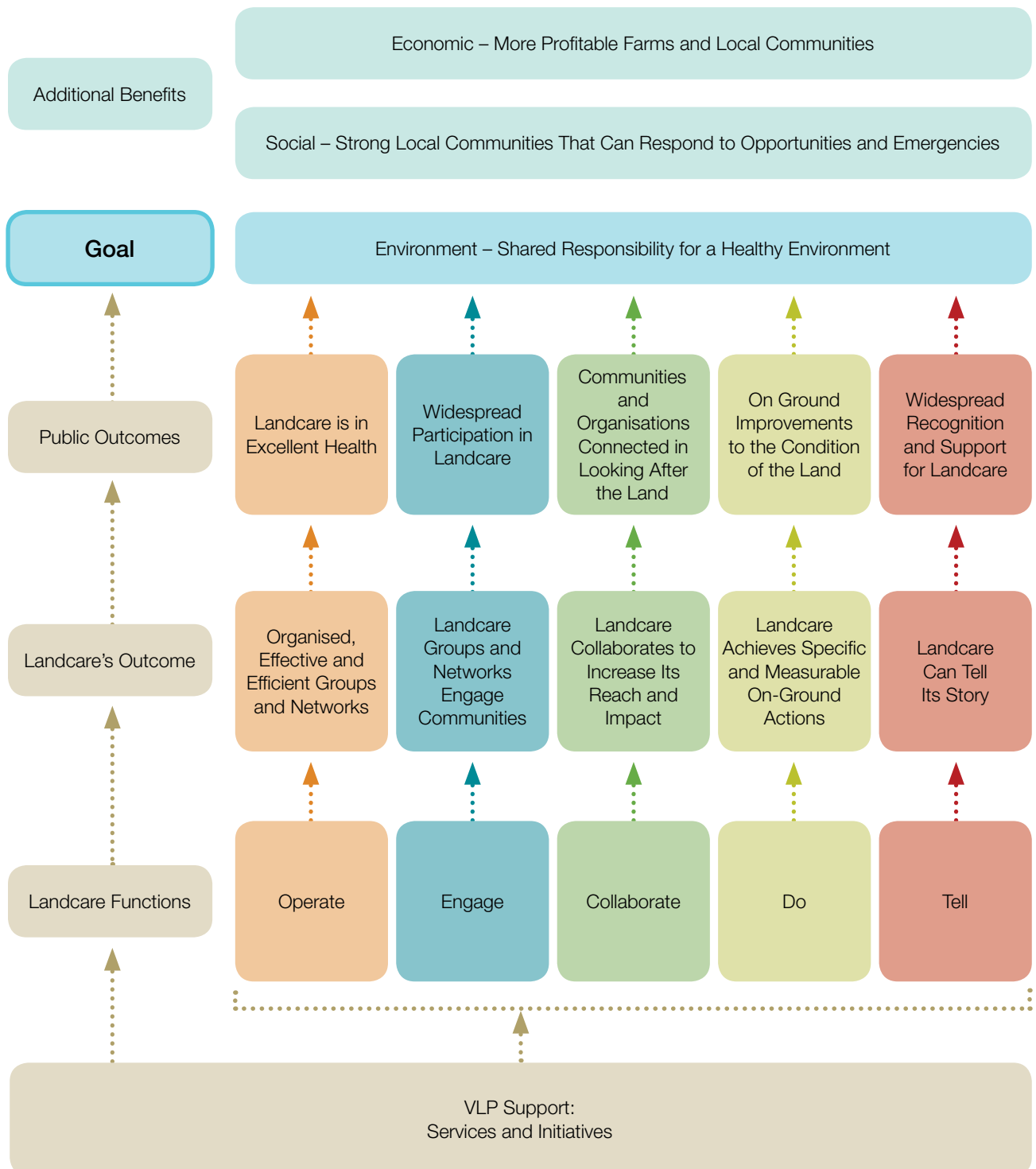
These functions are linked: well functioning Landcare groups and networks (Operate), will enable widespread environmental stewardship (Engage), that will be enacted through participating in strong and connected Landcare groups and networks (Collaborate), to deliver tangible on-ground improvements (Do), and garner public support and recognise achievements through appropriate monitoring, evaluation, performance reporting, and general communication (Tell).

The Program Logic for the Victorian Landcare Program shows how ideally, accomplishing the five functions will lead to a shared responsibility for a healthy environment that the public values (and is investing in), and will also create the additional social and economic benefits that are of value to the Landcare and broader Victorian community e.g. community well-being and resilience, and improved agricultural productivity.

The following pages outline the Program Logic for the VLP, and also describe the five functions of Operate, Engage, Collaborate, Do and Tell in more detail.



Program Logic for the Victorian Landcare Program





Operate

A key role of the VLP is helping Landcare groups and networks function well. Government recognises that Landcare would like a solid operating base, and at the same time knows that no Government program, including the VLP, is eternal or unchanging.

To function at their best, groups and networks alike benefit from dedicated and supported voluntary leaders, and the facilitation and coordination services of professional Landcare support staff.

From a VLP perspective, it is valuable to gain an understanding of the overall health of Landcare groups and networks, how this may have changed over time, and which elements in particular may require specific support. Going forward, interactions between the VLP and Landcare will be streamlined, expectations will be made clear, and services and initiatives will be delivered.

Public Outcome

Landcare is in excellent health

Landcare's Outcome

Organised, effective and efficient groups and networks

VLP Support

The VLP's support to help Landcare operate:

Establish	Maintain	Train	Grow	Facilitate	Coordinate	Streamline
Assist the establishment of new or lapsed groups and networks	Help maintain existing groups and networks by assisting them to meet basic operating requirements	Invest in training and development to build the operational skills of groups and networks	Support groups and networks to strengthen and/or grow to meet the needs of their community	Provide support to professional Landcare staff working as coordinators or facilitators at the local and landscape scale	Manage the delivery and coordination of core services and initiatives at the regional and state scale	Streamline administrative requirements and other interactions between the VLP and Landcare



Engage

A key strength of Landcare lies in its close connection with local communities. Landcare is a way of bringing people together around common natural resource management issues; facilitating stewardship of the local landscape in an inclusive way. This local stewardship in turn builds more connected and resilient communities.

To engage people successfully, Landcare groups and networks need leadership, resources and skills to engage volunteers and landholders in lasting, productive and constructive relationships. Acknowledging that a few people can make a huge difference; a few more can often increase the impact.

Retaining and attracting volunteers is becoming more challenging. Increasingly, people are busy, and want to interact with Landcare and other volunteer organisations in ways that address their particular needs, circumstances, and preferred way of communicating.

The VLP plays an important role in promoting participation in Landcare, especially with specific target groups.

Public Outcome

Widespread participation in Landcare

Landcare's Outcome

Landcare groups and networks engaged with communities

VLP Support

The VLP's support to help Landcare engage:

Research	Recruit	Inform	Innovate	Include	Seek
Provide advice in respect to current research and information, and commission research to fill gaps where appropriate	Support Landcare to connect with, and recruit and retain volunteers including people for leadership and office bearer positions	Assist in raising people's awareness and level of understanding of local landscapes and associated natural resource management issues and management practices	Promote innovative thinking to help people engage with groups and networks	Emphasise the inclusive nature of Landcare in all communications and promotions	Support Landcare in seeking help from new sources of volunteers



Collaborate

Landcarers recognise that partnerships are central to Landcare’s success, providing a means to share knowledge, skills and resources. To collaborate effectively, Landcare needs to be able to locate organisations with common objectives and identify ways of developing partnerships that can add value to each other’s work. Collaboration can include sharing information, seeking financial and other support, and participating in planning. Landcare can be a driver for change in communities, as well as being the people who do the on-ground works.

The VLP recognises that strong partnerships can lead to and enable better outcomes and is keen to assist Landcare to collaborate with Government and other entities.

Public Outcome

Communities and organisations connected in looking after the land

Landcare’s Outcome

Landcare collaborates to increase its reach and impact

VLP Support

The VLP’s support to help Landcare collaborate:

Listen	Nurture	Cooperate	Share	Guide
Encourage agencies at all levels of Government to listen to Landcarers when developing planning, priority-setting and policy	Develop the relationship between Landcare, the VLP, and other Government natural resource management and sustainable agriculture programs	Support groups and networks to find linkages with other organisations to collaborate on planning, and coordinating action	Assist Landcare groups and networks to share information on, and experiences of, best practice at the local and landscape scale	Provide guidance on potential collaborators for Landcare, and information on, how to negotiate and undertake partnerships



Do

The common goal of Landcare groups and networks across Victoria is to enhance and protect the environment, including cultural heritage assets, by building environmental awareness, encouraging sustainable farming and land management practices, and undertaking on-ground works. As land is a productive asset for many people involved with Landcare, improved agricultural productivity can also be an important driver for, and result of, environmental action. Common activities and achievements include the management of priority weeds on public and private land; rabbit control; protecting, enhancing and/or establishing native vegetation; improving the health of soil and waterways; awareness raising; and the facilitation and coordination of field days.

The Government values the contribution that Landcare makes to natural resource management and recognises that, through leveraging voluntary contributions of land, labour, and capital, Landcare provides very good value for public investment. On-ground improvements to the condition of the land are the key public outcome the Government wants from its investment in Landcare.

The VLP will continue to lead Government's support of Landcare taking action, and provide a point of reference for the many other sources of Government and non-Government support.

Public Outcome

On-ground improvements to the condition of the land

Landcare's Outcome

Landcare achieves specific and measurable on-ground actions

VLP Support

The VLP's support to help Landcare do:

Strategise	Design	Act	Scale
Support the development of regional Landcare support strategies and local action plans	Encourage Landcare groups and networks to design appropriate solutions to their priority issues	Support Landcare groups and networks to undertake actions to improve the condition of the environment	Where the capacity and desire exists, encourage Landcare groups and networks to work on large-scale landscape change



Tell

Because there are many separate groups and networks across the state, it is difficult to tell the overall story of Landcare's achievements. However, telling the story is important to reward volunteers and landholders for their efforts, make sure Landcare is recognised and valued with a good public profile, to encourage more people to join Landcare, to be accountable to funders, and to grow the investment from sources beyond Government.

The VLP has a role in drawing information together to help Landcare tell the state-wide story.

Improving the ability to tell the story of Landcare will require a focused effort up front. This will mean that in the short term, streamlining information collection, and evaluation and reporting processes will be a priority. In the longer term, improved systems and processes will save both Landcarers and the VLP time and money, and put Landcare in a better position to maintain widespread public recognition and support.

Public Outcome

Widespread public recognition and support for Landcare

Landcare's Outcome

Landcare can tell its story

VLP Support

The VLP's support to help Landcare tell:

Simplify	Collect	Store	Publish	Celebrate	Publicise
Ensure that the monitoring, evaluation and reporting interactions between the VLP and Landcare are as simple yet effective as possible	Support groups and networks in collecting the information needed to tell Landcare's story	Retain data and information so that it can be accessed, and easily interpreted and shared	Publish the story about the performance of Landcare	Enjoy success and reward effort with recognition events	Promote the work done by Landcarers and others to tell the Landcare story

Summary

Landcare has been part of Victoria for more than 25 years. The future for Landcare looks bright; however, there are significant opportunities and challenges for the Landcare community to respond to. To be able to achieve success, Landcare will need support. The Government is committed to supporting Landcare through the VLP.

The VLP is a catalyst. It exists to help Landcare achieve more than it could on its own. This Strategic Plan has been developed to make the VLP more effective in supporting Landcare for the future. It outlines how the VLP will assist Landcare to Operate, Engage, Collaborate, Do and Tell.

The Strategic Plan will be reviewed in five years time. A monitoring, evaluation and reporting system will be developed to ensure the Strategic Plan is implemented successfully, and the community is informed of progress.



The Government is committed to supporting Landcare through the VLP.

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